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homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Tuesday, June 16, 1942

QUESTION BOX:

Save fuel by top of stove cooking?:
Special care for sponges? :
What is a sad iron? :
Dry-clean wools before storing? :

ANSWERS FROM: Home economists and entomologists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture

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On the home front housewives are trying to prolong the use of whatever they can, and use their supplies thriftily. So today we have several conservation questions -- one about food, which is really a fuel-saving query, one about sponges, another about irons -- conserving equipment -- and one about moths, -- always a topic related to clothing conservation. Scientists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture reply to all these questions.

Let's take the one about saving fuel. This woman writes: "I am trying to save gas by cooking more main dishes on the top of the stove instead of in the oven. But steaks and chops are too expensive to serve often. And I find nearly all the low-cost meats like stews and pot-roasts take long, slow cooking, so they don't save gas. Can you suggest any other economical meat dishes that don't need long cooking?"

Yes, indeed, the home economists say, - there are plenty of them. One way to avoid long cooking of the less tender cuts is to grind them. Grinding breaks up the tough fibers of the meat. Ground meat cooks fast, like tender cuts. Make the freshly ground meat into patties or meat cakes, like hamburgers, lamb or veal patties, or, in the case of pork, into sausage cakes.

Left-over cooked meat you can also grind up and use in brown or moist hash or in croquettes, or heat the meat in white sauce or gravy on toast or in a noodle or rice ring. A very good inexpensive dish is beef and ham gumbo in a rice ring. Sometimes well-seasoned chopped cooked meat in gravy is dished up as a "hot sandwich", on slices of bread. Or you can use moist chopped cooked meat as the filling between two

slices of bread, then dip the sandwich in an egg and milk mixture. Fry the whole sandwich in a little fat as French toast.

Chop suey is another low-cost meat dish that doesn't require long cooking because the meat is cut in slivers or shreds. For this you pan onions, celery, and several other vegetables in a skillet, seasoning them with soy sauce, and add cooked shredded chicken, pork, or other meat. You can find a recipe for chop suey in almost any cook book. The ingredients are not always exactly alike, but you generally start with plenty of shredded onion and celery. Several crisp ingredients such as green pepper, Brazil nuts, slices radishes or Jerusalem artichoke are all good in a chop suey mixture, also mushrooms. Top off with the shredded meat from which the dish takes its name.

One more idea for top-of-the-stove meats: The small organs,-- liver, kidneys, sweetbreads, brains. Except for the less tender beef heart and beef kidney, all these cook in a short time.

Our next question is about sponges. A homemaker asks how to care for bath sponges so they'll last, now they are among the scarce articles. The home economists give one or two good rules of care for all sponges,-- natural, rubber, or cellulose. Wash them in warm soap and water after every use, and rinse the soap out well. Squeeze them,-- don't twist them. Dry natural sponges in the shade, hanging them up by means of a cord run through the holes. Store rubber sponges away from heat, light, and metals, especially copper. Handle a cellulose sponge gently, too, and don't twist it. You can sterilize a cellulose sponge if necessary, by boiling it.

Now we come to a question from a city housewife. She says, "I recently heard someone say that the old-fashioned sad iron is likely to come back to the home. Just what is a 'sad iron'?"

Well, a "sad iron" or "flat iron" is the kind of iron our grandmothers used before electric irons were invented. Sad irons heat on top of the kitchen stove. Many people still use them where there is no electric current. Some sad irons have a handle

made in one with the body of the iron. This kind of an iron handle gets hot as the iron heats so you need to use a thick padded holder over the handle. Another type of sad iron has a detachable wooden handle, and doesn't need a hot holder. Either kind is handy to have in reserve in case of accident to your electric iron, or temporary shutting off of the current.

Sad irons work in pairs, - one on the stove, heating, while the other is in use on the board. For starched clothes and others needing a very hot iron, you need a third iron, so as to keep two heating. Protect your sad irons from rust when not in use by keeping them dry, and keep the bottoms smooth with salt and wax. To clean the bottom of the iron rub the iron on salt, and then shine with a piece of paraffin or wax in a cloth.

Questions about moths are still coming in. Here's a letter asking whether it is necessary to dry clean garments and blankets before packing them away for the summer.

Entomologists of the Department reply that dry cleaning is desirable, but not absolutely necessary, if you can launder the wool article. You can have blankets dry cleaned or washed, whichever you prefer. If there are grease or food spots on clothing, moths are likely to select those spots and lay eggs near them. Even if there are no spots on the woolens, brush and sun everything well to get rid of any moth eggs or larvae that may already be on the articles. Pack in boxes that can be sealed on the edges, or in strong paper wrappings with the openings sealed with gummed paper tape. As an added safety measure, put some moth balls or flakes of paradichlorobenzene or napthalene in the parcel with the clothing or blankets. Don't waste these moth flakes or crystals. Use them to best advantage since they are becoming scarce in some places.

That's the last question for today. (Written by Elna H. Wharton)

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